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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000233

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TAGS: [PGOV PHUM KDEM NI ELECTIONS](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION PARTNERS: SKEPTICISM OVER VOTER
REGISTRATION CONTINUES

REF: ABUJA 182 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas P. Furey for reasons 1.4.
(b & d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met with representatives of IFES, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI) and PACT Nigeria on February 1 to discuss ongoing elections preparations efforts. Though INEC extended the voters registration exercise to February 2, the elections partners remained skeptical about its success. IFES reported that as of January 31, INEC claimed to have registered 54 million voters. INEC plans to display the voters roll within the next two weeks. However, a clear process has not been announced to handle challenges and amendments. The election partners remain concerned that INEC has not yet issued rules and procedures for the accreditation of foreign and domestic election observers or party polling agents. NDI plans to deploy a team of long-term observers to Nigeria on March 15, while its short-term observer delegation, led by former Secretary of State Albright, is scheduled to arrive in country mid-April. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) IFES reported that INEC claims to have registered 54 million Nigerian voters as of January 31. However, IFES cannot yet comment on the quality of the data captured and noted that it would be more accurate to talk about 54 million "data entries" than "registered voters" at this stage. INEC extended the registration exercise until February 2, and the commission plans to display the preliminary voters roll for challenges and amendments during the second week of February. The voters roll will be disaggregated and the relevant portion will be displayed at each of the 122,000 polling stations. IFES expressed concern that INEC does not have a transparent process in place by which it will handle challenges and amendments. A comprehensive system for challenges and amendments was proposed by IFES to INEC months ago, but INEC now lacks the time to follow the proposed system. Simple amendments to correct data entry errors should go fairly smoothly, although time could be a problem, since less than two weeks remain until the voters roll must be final. More serious problems could arise if citizens attempt to "challenge" registrations. For example, if a Nigerian discovers the name of a deceased, foreign, or underage person on the voters roll, he could challenge that registration as invalid. It is unclear how INEC will be able

to evaluate and adjudicate such challenges before February 14.

¶3. (C) IRI reported that the political parties are very disappointed with the voter registration process, although they admit that they "share some of the blame," given reports about some party officials stealing registration machines and placing them in their homes. IRI also reported a number of problems with the registration exercise. IRI staff members have heard that some Nigerians have paid bribes to register and that some registration sites are taking "short-cuts" to save time. Some sites have reportedly skipped capturing fingerprints, while others are using a fixed date of birth for each registrant in order to speed the process. The IRI-sponsored political party code of conduct has been finalized and will be launched February 8 with INEC participation.

¶4. (C) INEC has not yet issued clear guidelines on how domestic and international observers and polling agents will be accredited for the April 2007 elections. PACT reports that in mid-February, INEC plans to host a roundtable discussion with civil society to discuss accreditation and deployment of domestic observers. However, the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) is planning to hold its own election observation meeting on February 9. This signals continued trouble between INEC and ACE (reftel). PACT said that some civil society groups have reported harassment after asking for accreditation as election monitors. Action Aid was reportedly visited by SSS agents and questioned about its legal status, funding, and foreign ties after inquiring about accreditation.

¶5. (C) NDI recently sent a letter to INEC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting permission to observe the April elections. The letter stated that NDI's long-term observers would arrive March 15 and remain in Nigeria until May 15.

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NDI reported that its short-term observer delegation would be a high-powered group headed by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Short-term observers plan to arrive mid-April. NDI plans to field observers in 15 states, though the country team noted that security concerns may preclude their deployment in Rivers State as planned.
CAMPBELL